

COMMUNITY CARE LICENSING DIVISION

*"PROMOTING HEALTHY, SAFE AND
SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY CARE"*

THE GOOD NEIGHBOR GUIDE

A Guidebook for Residential
Care Facilities for the Elderly



**ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING
POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS
IN THE COMMUNITY**



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A GUIDEBOOK FOR RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES FOR THE ELDERLY

What makes a good neighbor? From our personal experiences in our own homes, we all have an understanding of the possible answers to this question. Good neighbors are people we can trust to keep an eye on our house when we're away; people we can depend on to help keep the street looking good by keeping their lawns mowed, their yards neat and houses painted. Good neighbors are those that care about the activities in and the safety of their neighborhoods.

When you open a Residential Care Facility for the Elderly (RCFE) in a community, you become the new neighbor on the block and the neighborhood's expectations of you are the same as they would be of any new neighbor. There have been instances when RCFEs have not made good neighbors, thus community residents are often suspicious or hostile when they learn that a facility has opened or is preparing to open in their neighborhood. Remember, your facility is providing a service to the community. Some of your referrals for placement may come from your neighbors. What neighbors see, hear or learn about your facility will determine whether or not they refer family members or friends to you for services.

What can you do to create a good reputation and prove that RCFEs can be good neighbors? This pamphlet contains ideas, suggestions and tips identified by experienced providers and community care licensing staff for establishing and maintaining positive relationships in the community. It also includes a summary of the laws and regulations regarding how RCFEs must relate to residents and agencies in the community, as well as some examples of protocols you may wish to adapt for use in your own program.

BEFORE YOU MOVE IN

Even before you begin accepting residents at a new location, there is work to do to reassure your new neighbors. The old maxim "you never get a second chance to make a good first impression" applies here. Do your homework so you can anticipate and prevent problems wherever possible. Consider the following:

- Know your neighborhood and make sure you have a legal right to be there. Facilities that are six beds or less are considered to be a residence like any other in the neighborhood.
- Develop a neighbor introduction letter or prepare brochures containing information about your program that can be shared with neighbors; be clear, factual and straightforward.

- Invite your neighbors to an “Open House”. Typically, Open House events are intended to welcome others into your home. In the case of an RCFE provider, this will be an opportunity to share plans about your facility, about the residents you will be caring for and about what they can expect when your residents move in. Neighbors are frequently concerned about the safety of the neighborhood. Unrecognized vehicles or people may present a concern for neighbors. For example, there may be family members visiting the facility or, there may be emergency vehicles to provide urgent care or transportation for your residents. Use the “Open House” to be forthcoming with information and share your contact information so that if an issue arises, they will know how to reach you.
- Have a good neighbor plan ready in advance and put it into effect as soon as you move in.

MAINTENANCE

Maintenance is the essence of “good neighborliness” The appearance of the property is often considered a direct reflection of every other aspect of your program. Good maintenance of the house may also reassure neighbors that your program and the residents are equally well cared-for and supervised.

- Each home should be physically maintained in a manner that does credit to the neighborhood. The objective should be to have the best looking place in the neighborhood. Lack of property maintenance will result in neighbor concerns about the potential effect on their property value.
- Consider employing a young adult in the neighborhood to handle your lawn care. This helps you maintain the appearance of the grounds, while building a relationship with your neighbor.
- Conduct monthly inspections of the facility and recognize or reward the staff for their efforts to make the home presentable and attractive.
- Adhere to community standards for landscaping, painting and décor.

RESIDENT CONDUCT

Have high standards regarding the conduct of the residents you serve. RCFEs serving six or fewer residents are exempt from local zoning ordinances because they are considered a residential use of property. They are considered a home just like all other homes in the neighborhood. The residents in your facility are community members and should be encouraged to participate in neighborhood events or outdoor activities. Part of your role as a caregiver is to help residents prepare for outside activities including appropriate apparel and appearance.

The following are some suggestions to ensure your residents are also good neighbors:

- Use the back yard or neighborhood park for outdoor activities.

- Keep the volume of stereos and television at a level that does not disturb the neighbors.
- Encourage residents to use sidewalks and refrain from walking on neighbor's property. You may want to walk your neighborhood first to ensure that the sidewalks do not pose any hazards to your residents.
- Encourage residents to exchange greetings with neighbors who appear receptive to this.
- Encourage residents to dress appropriately and use appropriate language.

STAFF CONDUCT

Your staff members are an extension of you and your program. Train your staff to demonstrate courteous, professional behavior at all times. Consider some of the following rules for staff conduct:

- Observe all vehicle safety and driving laws at all times.
- When transporting residents, show respect for the neighbors. For example, when picking up a resident, don't honk the horn and leave the engine running; park the car properly and go inside to get the resident.
- Be aware of parking around the care home; don't park in a manner that may cause concern to the neighbors.
- Be sure that the residents are properly supervised in the community.
- The attitude of staff in the RCFE sets the tone for the behavior of the residents. If staff respond to neighbors in a defensive or aggressive manner when complaints or questions are raised about the facility, developing a congenial relationship will be unlikely. Staff and residents should adopt the position that they are a part of the community.
- Be an overall good neighbor. Take walks around the block. See the neighbors and let them see you. Build relationships on a personal level as much as your time allows.

NEIGHBORHOOD COMPLAINTS

Take all complaints seriously and make it a priority to respond to complainants as soon as possible and in a respectful manner. Failure to be responsive to complaints usually will result in the need to find a listener somewhere else. If it's not you, it could be local government, local media or the local licensing office. The involvement of any of these entities can start a progression of steps over which you have little direct control. Wouldn't you be in a better position if you had the first opportunity to respond to concerns? Consider the following:

- Make sure the neighbors know who to contact if they have a complaint or a question and how to contact that person.
- Provide mediation training to the person assigned to deal with complaints.
- Always designate one person to be your community liaison. Staff on site may do “Band-Aid interventions,” but getting a complaint to your administrative designee allows for proper follow-up, consistency of response and control.
- When a complaint is received, ensure that staff follow the neighborhood complaint policy protocol as outlined in your facility’s program statement.
- Learn to field complaints in a positive way. If a neighbor complains, legitimately or not, take action. If it is not your facility’s responsibility or a client’s problem, you might briefly say so, but quickly offer to remedy the situation if it is within your power to do so.
- Always respond to the complainant in a reasonable amount of time, and be sure the response addresses their complaint. If the complaint is reasonable, acknowledge this and explain any program adjustments you are making. If the complaint is unfounded, explain why.
- If you are a corporation, keep your Board of Directors informed about neighborhood issues. Board members provide a valuable link to the community and can help facilitate communication and understanding of the issues from the perspective of both the community and the RCFE.

REGULATIONS AND POLICIES

Being a good neighbor is not specifically required by licensing regulations or other laws, but there are licensing requirements that were developed in response to public concern in this area. Review the requirements provided to ensure you are in compliance:

Requirements for Responding to Neighborhood Incidents and Complaints

Licensees who do not live on the premises of RCFEs licensed for six or fewer clients are required by Health and Safety Code Section 1569.175 to have written procedures approved by licensing, to respond to incidents and complaints.

The procedures must include:

- A fixed weekly time the licensee or their representative will be at the facility to respond to neighborhood complaints. As a reminder, available times to respond to complaints are important. Complaining parties may work and only be available after 5:00pm or on weekends. Evening or weekend hours should be considered when setting a fixed weekly time to respond to complaints. The extent to which you can accommodate a complaining party may result in a more positive outcome.

- Procedures for notifying the licensee or their representative of neighborhood incidents or complaints.
- Procedures for the licensee or their representative to personally investigate neighborhood incidents or complaints.
- Procedures for notifying the complainant in writing as to what actions were taken to address the issue or why no action was taken.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Do not ignore your relationship with local law enforcement, or with any local response agencies. Although they exist to serve you as well as your neighbors, know that your facility may be perceived as increasing their workload. Therefore, make every effort to make their jobs as easy for them as you can. Be proactive in gaining their understanding and support. Consider the following:

- Get to know the local police and fire department before they may be called to your facility. Invite them to become familiar with your home, the services you provide and the residents in care. Invite them to the facility for a visit, dinner and talks with the residents. If you ever have to call them for assistance, it is important that they have some understanding of your program. It will also be helpful if they know the residents and have had positive experiences with the program.
- Ask the police and fire departments to send out training officers to meet with you and your staff to share information on how they do business and vice versa. An educational program at the facility can be a very positive initial contact for police and fire personnel.
- Ensure that your staff understand and follow your facility's policies and procedures in order to minimize your reliance on law enforcement in crisis situations.
- For non-emergency matters with law enforcement, go to the local law enforcement office. Police vehicles parked outside of a home may be construed by neighbors as a problem with the facility.

When a Client is Absent Without Leave (AWOL): Reporting to Law Enforcement

When a resident leaves a facility without notice or fails to return to the facility at the appointed time, providers are often uncertain about how long to wait before making a missing person's report to the local law enforcement office. Regulations require that AWOLs which "threaten the physical or emotional health and safety of a resident" be reported to the Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) within 24 hours. However, regulations do not specify when an AWOL must be reported to law enforcement. It is therefore recommended that you meet with your local law enforcement office and develop an agreement about when, and under what circumstances, you will call in an AWOL.

This agreement, preferably in writing, should be shared with your local licensing office. Incident reports submitted to CCLD regarding AWOLs should refer to the terms of this agreement, and the actions taken by the facility in response to the AWOL should be consistent with the procedures agreed upon with law enforcement. In this way, everyone: the provider, CCLD, and the local police or sheriff's department will be on the same page with regard to reporting AWOLs to law enforcement.

COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Public relations are important! Consider the following approaches:

- Display your license in a prominent location.
- Hold periodic open houses; invite the neighbors in every now and then. Don't violate confidentiality but show off your program and what residents have and what you do for your residents. Show your neighbors your successes to help them accept and hopefully support the need for your program.
- Acquaint your new neighbors with the program and present the name and phone number of the administrator or agency liaison for future reference if concerns arise.
- Invite community leaders to visit the facility. Present key individuals with invitations to facility events.
- Identify your most critical neighbor and offer to set aside time to meet with him/her regarding their concerns. If you can satisfy this person, you probably won't have to worry about anybody else.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Community service activities are wonderful opportunities to demonstrate your commitment to the neighborhood and your concern for the good citizenship of your residents. Getting involved with such activities can develop relationships that will help you and your residents become part of the community. The following is a list of community service activities you could undertake:

- Remove and replace garbage cans for the elderly on trash day.
- Cut lawns, make home repairs or do yard work for neighbors who are dependent or elderly.
- Participate in neighborhood improvement projects.
- Help clean up the neighborhood in the aftermath of storms, floods, etc.
- Participate in local community special events.

- Purchase goods and services from local merchants.
- Loan facility equipment to neighbors.
- Participate in the adopt-a-highway program.
- Learn more about the social, religious and recreational opportunities in your neighborhood.

JOIN, JOIN, JOIN!

Belonging to local groups and community service organizations is a great way to “walk the walk” as a member of the community. Following are some suggestions for getting involved in the community:

- Participate in the neighborhood watch program.
- Participate in homeowners and apartment associations.
- Encourage staff to get involved in community organizations (e.g. as board members of community nonprofits, volunteers with police or fire auxiliaries, etc.) so that you will be known and seen as neighbors who are actively involved in the betterment of the community.

The information expressed herein is to assist Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly in establishing and maintaining positive relationships in the community. Questions or suggestions regarding this document should be directed to your local Licensing Regional office.